

KWACK K. WOO
Private (Pvt), United States (U.S.) Army

PERSONAL INFORMATION: Private Kwack K. Woo, service number 39277218, entered active military service on 15 January 1943 from Los Angeles, California.¹ He served in Company E, 318th Infantry Regiment, 80th Infantry Division, in the European Theater during the Second World War. He was killed in action near Biesdorf, Germany, on 9 February 1945. His remains were not accounted for after the fighting. Today, Pvt Woo is memorialized on the Walls of the Missing at Luxembourg American Cemetery, Hamm, Luxembourg.² In September 2022, the Department of Defense (DoD) and the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) exhumed Unknown remains, designated X-8517 Neuville (X-8517), from the North Africa American Cemetery in Carthage, Tunisia, for forensic analysis and comparison with unresolved soldiers. The circumstances of Pvt Woo's case are recorded in the Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF) under his name, unit records of the 318th Infantry Regiment, and analytical documents produced by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA).³

CIRCUMSTANCES OF LOSS: In early February 1945, the 318th Infantry Regiment, 80th Infantry Division, occupied a battle line along a heavily wooded ridge on the Luxembourg-Germany border (see Figure 1). The regiment's left flank was anchored at the town of Bigelbach, while its right flank ended at Beaufort. In the valley below the 318th Infantry Regiment lay the town of Dillingen and the Sauer River. Past that were the German 352d and 212th *Volks grenadier* Divisions, which were prepared to defend Germany's western border. The 352d *Volks grenadier* Division was still reeling from the heavy losses it suffered during the recent Ardennes offensive (known as the "Battle of the Bulge" to the Americans). Yet, the Germans were determined to defend their homeland and used the terrain to their advantage. The most significant natural obstacle was the Sauer River. While normally a meandering waterway, melting snow caused it to triple in size in February 1945. The 318th Infantry Regiment soldiers found the river to be 25 to over 30 yards wide, with a current of almost 20 miles per hour. German forces destroyed the bridges across the river, which meant any American crossing would require boats, or for American engineers to construct temporary bridges while under enemy observation and fire. The snowmelt also meant that the roads and trails American forces used quickly turned to mud, slowing the transportation of supplies and reinforcements, and generally making the living and fighting conditions worse. Finally, the terrain in this region was rugged and heavily forested, giving the defending Germans the advantage of camouflage and cover.⁴

¹ Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF) for Kwack K. Woo, Private (Pvt), 39277218, Record Group (RG) 92: Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, National Personnel Record Center (NPRC), St. Louis, MO

² World War II Honor Roll listing for Kwack K. Woo, Pvt, 39277218, American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), <http://www.abmc.gov>.

³ 80th Infantry Division, Entry 427, RG 407: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, NARA; "Association of Unknown X-8517 Neuville with One Unresolved World War II Casualty," 5 April 2017, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) electronic case file.

⁴ 318th Infantry Regiment History – February 1945, pp. 2-4, File "380-INF(318)-0.2 (25864) History – 318th Inf Regt – 80th Inf Div. Feb 45," Box 10299, Entry 427, RG 407, NARA.

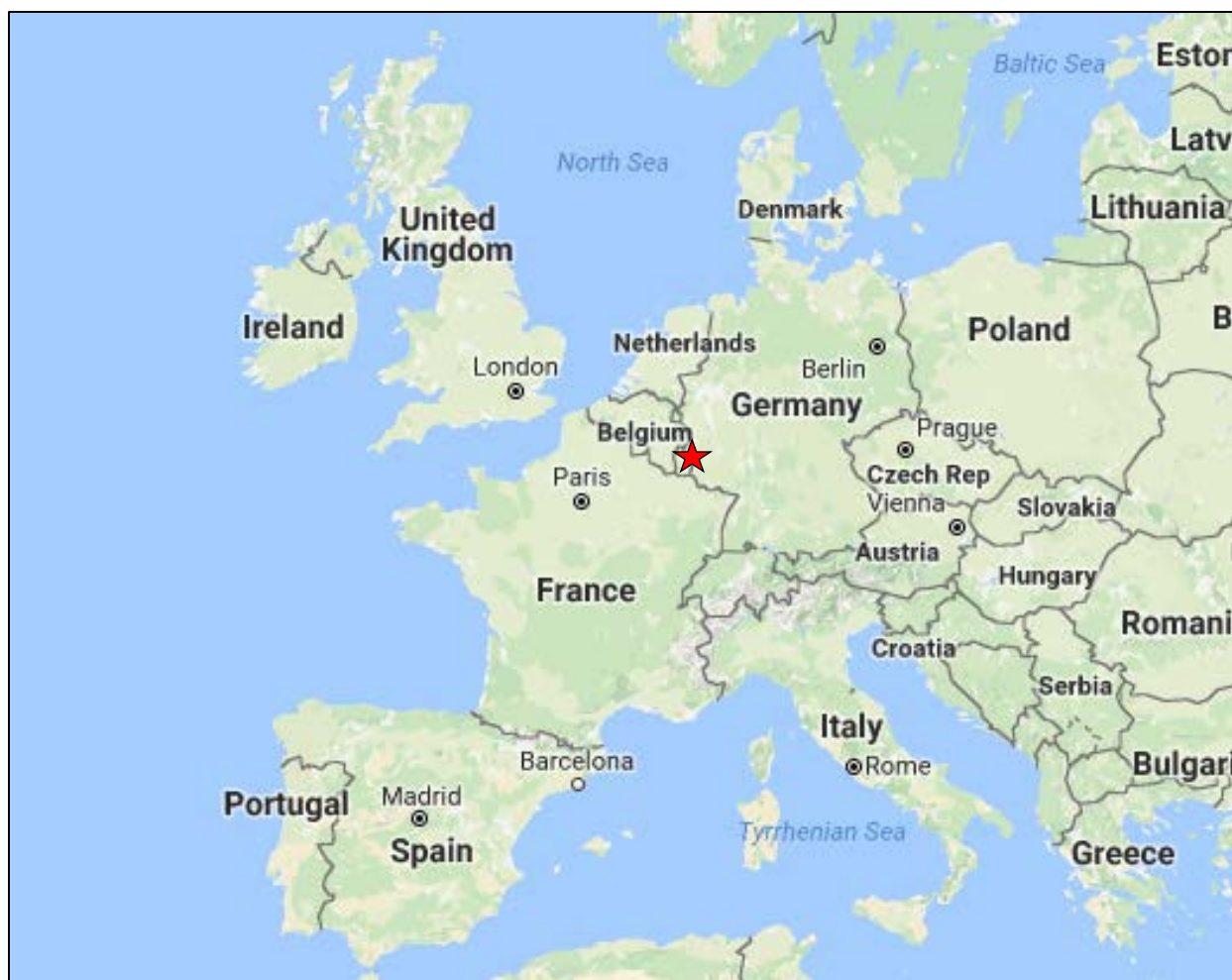


Figure 1. Map of Northern Europe, showing the location of Biesdorf, Germany (red star).

Small American patrols covertly crossed the river in early February to test the German defenses. On the night of 4 February, one patrol from 2d Battalion, 318th Infantry Regiment, crossed near the town of Bigelbach and found few German soldiers there. Regimental planners, therefore, chose that site for the 2d Battalion’s main crossing.⁵

At 3:00 a.m. on 7 February 1945, the 318th Infantry Regiment began its attack across the Sauer River, with 2d Battalion—which included Company E, Pvt Woo’s unit—in the lead. The 811th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 633d Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion provided artillery and heavy weapon support, firing upon German positions on the opposite bank. The 166th Engineer Combat Battalion oversaw and organized the actual river crossing, ferrying the infantry troops across in the wooden assault boats. The crossing took longer than expected. The regiment’s history noted, “Due to difficulties presented by the unusually swift current and floating debris, a large part of the Battalion had been unable to cross by daylight, at which time intense fires from

⁵ 318th Infantry Regiment History – February 1945, p. 4, File “380-INF(318)-0.2 (25864) History – 318th Inf Regt – 80th Inf Div. Feb 45,” Box 10299, Entry 427, RG 407, NARA.

small arms, automatic weapons, self-propelled guns, artillery and nebelwerfer [German rocket launcher] batteries were brought to bear on the crossing site.”⁶

All of 2d Battalion was across the river by the end of 7 February. Third Battalion then followed, completing its crossing early the next morning. Having established a solid footing on German soil, and with 3d Battalion in place, the 2d Battalion troops advanced northward during the afternoon of 8 February, passing through the woods and high ground south of Biesdorf (Figure 2). Progress was slow at first, but the battalion had covered 1,200 yards by 11:00 p.m. that night.⁷

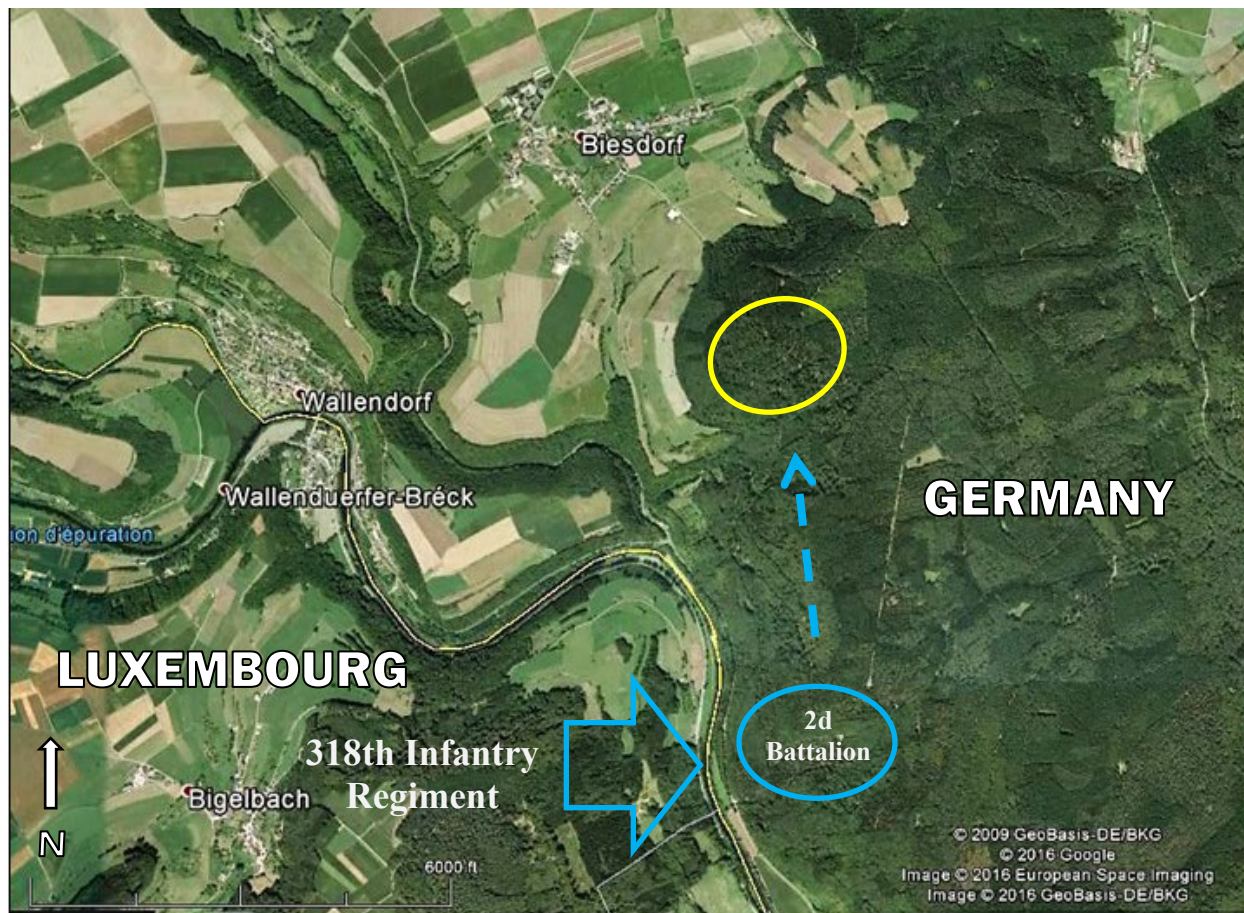


Figure 2. Modern aerial image of Biesdorf, Germany. On the morning of 8 February 1945, 2d Battalion (which included Pvt Woo’s Company E), held positions at grid coordinates 982413 and 985415 (blue circle). The 2d Battalion advanced northward approximately 1,200 yards (yellow circle) that day.

⁶ 318th Infantry Regiment History – February 1945, p. 5, File “380-INF(318)-0.2 (25864) History – 318th Inf Regt – 80th Inf Div. Feb 45,” Box 10299, Entry 427, RG 407, NARA.

⁷ 318th Infantry Regiment History – February 1945, p. 5, File “380-INF(318)-0.2 (25864) History – 318th Inf Regt – 80th Inf Div. Feb 45,” Box 10299; 318th Infantry Regiment S-3 Journal, 8 February 1945, File “380-INF(318)-3.1 S-3 Jrnl – 318th Inf Regt, 80th Inf Div, Feb 45,” Box 10304, Entry 427, RG 407, NARA.

Regimental headquarters issued orders to 1st and 2d Battalions to attack northward toward Biesdorf at 8:00 a.m. on 9 February. However, 1st Battalion, which followed 3d Battalion across the river, did not have all of its units on the German side of the Sauer by that morning. The attack was therefore postponed, as 1st Battalion units moved forward from the bridgehead to the front in piecemeal fashion.⁸

On 9 February, the 2d Battalion troops primarily held their ground in the forest south of Biesdorf, awaiting the arrival of 1st Battalion for the expected assault upon the town. Details of the action that day are sparse in the regiment's after-action report and historical summary, but Pvt Woo was reportedly killed at some point in the fighting. According to records in his IDPF, he was shot in the stomach by a German machine gun while moving through the woods.⁹

SEARCH AND RECOVERY: The 318th Infantry Regiment captured Biesdorf on 10 February 1945, the day after his reported death. From there, American forces continued the northward and eastward advance into Germany. Regarding Pvt Woo's remains, Sergeant (Sgt) Gerald M. Lawrence of Company E later noted he had heard "Pvt Woo's body was seen by one of our cooks in this vicinity on the 11 Feb. 1945."¹⁰ The location was described only as a wooded area near Biesdorf. Private Woo's file contains no other information about his loss or attempts to recover his remains.

Beginning in 1946, the American Graves Registration Command (AGRC), U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps, was the organization tasked with recovering missing American personnel in the European Theater. In October 1947, an AGRC field investigation team searched for the remains of Pvt Woo and other missing soldiers from the 318th Infantry Regiment. The investigators learned from local German residents that German forces had buried the remains of several American soldiers at some point after the fighting. "No attempt had been made to identify the deceased and mark the graves accordingly," an AGRC officer later wrote.¹¹ The investigation team exhumed all the graves they found in the Wallendorf and Biesdorf areas, but none of the remains found were believed to belong to Pvt Woo.¹²

As part of their work, AGRC teams often recovered remains that could not immediately be identified, which they brought to the nearest concentration point or temporary American military cemetery. The AGRC designated these "Unknowns" with an "X" and a number, usually followed by the name of the temporary cemetery where they were initially buried. The collected documentation for such Unknowns is commonly referred to as an "X-file." At the time of the AGRC's search for Pvt Woo, graves registration analysts routinely compared information for

⁸ 318th Infantry Regiment History – February 1945, p. 5, File "380-INF(318)-0.2 (25864) History – 318th Inf Regt – 80th Inf Div. Feb 45," Box 10299, Entry 427, RG 407, NARA; 318th Infantry Regiment After Action Report, February 1945, Entries for 8 and 9 February 1945, File "380-INF(318)-0.3 A/A rpts – 318th Inf Regt – 80th Inf Div. Jan0May 45," Box 10299, Entry 427, RG 407, NARA; 318th Infantry Regiment S-3 Journal, 8-9 February 1945, File "380-INF(318)-3.1 S-3 Jnl – 318th Inf Regt, 80th Inf Div, Feb 45," Box 10304, Entry 427, RG 407, NARA.

⁹ Captain (Capt) C. W. Steinsiek, "Non-Recoverable," no date (n.d.), IDPF for Pvt Woo.

¹⁰ Capt Steinsiek, "Non-Recoverable," n.d., IDPF for Pvt Woo.

¹¹ Capt Steinsiek, "Non-Recoverable," n.d., IDPF for Pvt Woo.

¹² Harold P. Boone, "Narrative Wallendorf-Biesdorf, Germany," 6 October 1947, IDPF for Pvt Woo.

unidentified remains with the physical data and circumstances of loss of service members missing in the same area. Technicians considered a possible association between Pvt Woo and a set of remains designated X-435 Hamm. However, officials ultimately rejected the association based upon an unfavorable biological comparison.¹³

On 16 November 1950, having received no further information that could lead to Pvt Woo's recovery, a board of officers recommended that his remains—along with two other individuals from the 318th Infantry Regiment who went missing in the Sauer River area—be declared Non-Recoverable.¹⁴ On 7 February 1951, Army officials formally approved the board's recommendation.¹⁵

RECENT INVESTIGATIONS: Historians at DPAA are in the midst of a comprehensive research and recovery project focused on American soldiers missing from ground combat along Germany's western border. This effort includes proposing both disinterments of unidentified remains for possible identification, and new field investigations of former battle sites. A DPAA historian analyzed AGRC reports regarding X-8517 Neuville (X-8517), a set of unidentified remains recovered from a spot in the woods 1.86 miles (3,000 meters) southeast of Wallendorf in 1951. The remains were scattered on the surface of the ground over a 22-yard (20 meter) area (see Figures 3 and 4). Remnants of U.S. military clothing, an American steel helmet, and American ammunition were found with the remains, but the searchers found no identification tags or any other material evidence to establish identity.¹⁶ The recovery leader noted that numerous artillery and mortar craters around the remains suggested the individual had been killed by artillery fire “during the fighting which took place in the area in Autumn 1944.”¹⁷

¹³ “Non-Recoverable Case Record of Review and Approval,” 6 February 1951, IDPF for Pvt Woo.

¹⁴ “Proceedings of Board of Officers appointed in accordance with letter AGAO-S 293.9,” 28 November 1950, IDPF for Pvt Woo.

¹⁵ Non-Recoverable Case Record of Review and Approval, “Woo, Kwack K.,” 7 February 1951, IDPF for Pvt Woo.

¹⁶ Master Sergeant (M Sgt) Harry Leier, “Narrative of Investigation & Disinterment at Wallendorf (6/P-94), Germany,” 14 February 1951, Unknown X-8517 Neuville file (X-8517), RG 92, NPRC.

¹⁷ M Sgt Leier, “Narrative of Investigation & Disinterment at Wallendorf (6/P-94), Germany,” 14 February 1951, X-8517 file.

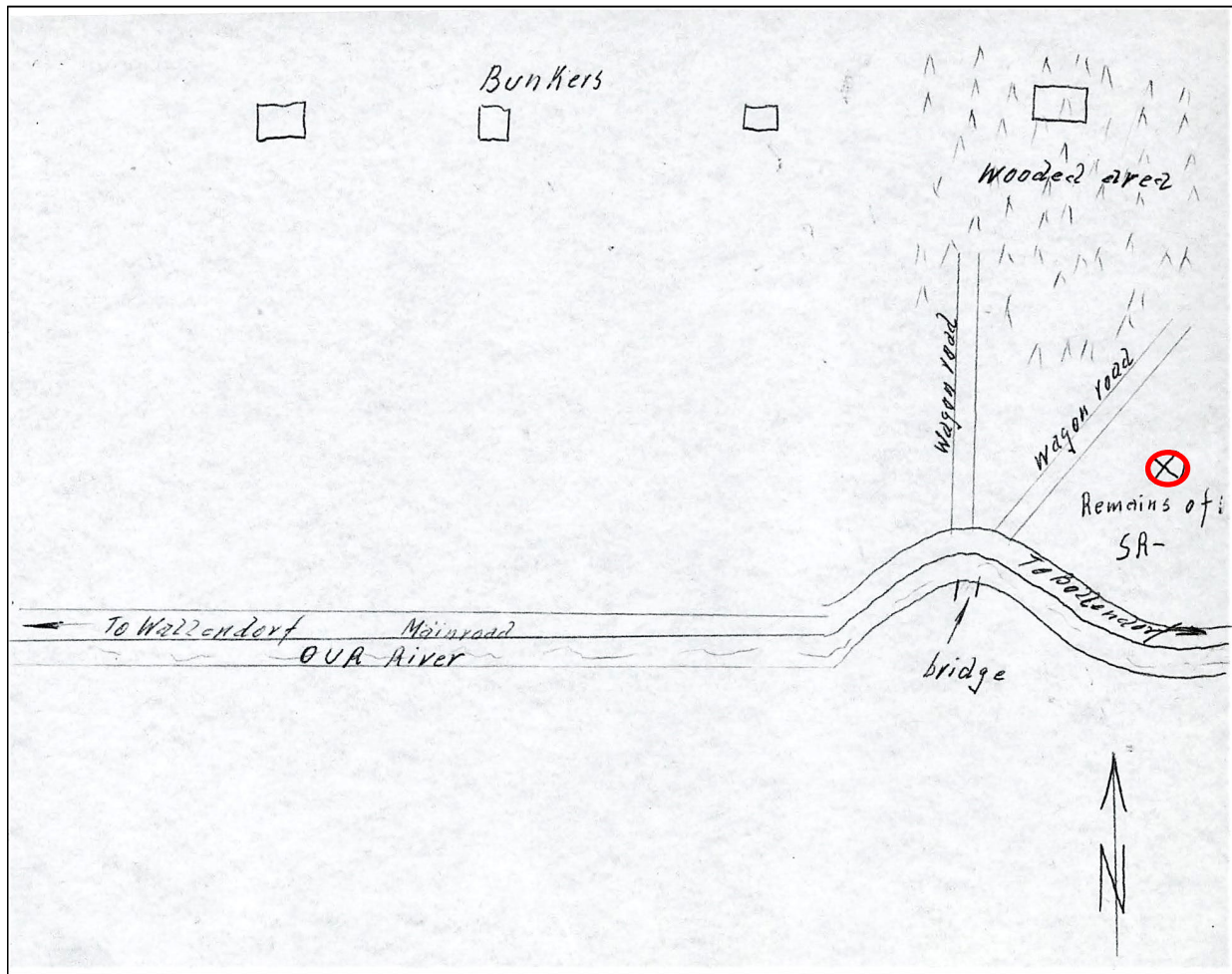


Figure 3. Sketch map from the February 1951 AGRC investigation in Wallendorf, Germany. The X-8517 remains (red circle) were reportedly found scattered on the forest floor approximately 1.86 miles (3,000 meters) southeast of Wallendorf.¹⁸

¹⁸ X-8517 file.



Figure 4. Modern aerial imagery showing the approximate recovery location of X-8517 (gold star).

The remains were collected and sent to the central processing point at Neuville-en-Condroz, Belgium (Neuville), and given the designation X-8517.¹⁹ Once there, technicians carefully analyzed the remains. They described them as partial, dry bones. The lead examiner estimated the individual's age as 21 years old. A single measurement of one bone was taken, and based on that the individual's stature was estimated at 5' 3³/₄" tall.²⁰ The examiner described the individual as "white" with a "light build."²¹

¹⁹ M Sgt Leier, "Report of Investigation Area Search," 14 February 1951, X-8517 file.

²⁰ Dr. Alexander Tardy, "Narrative," 1 March 1951, and Skeletal Chart, n.d., X-8517 file.

²¹ QMC Form 1044, Page 3, 1 March 1951, X-8517 file.

The material evidence analyzed with X-8517 included remnants of olive drab trousers, shirt, and field jacket, one U.S. Army steel helmet with liner, a standard-issue Army belt buckle, remnants of a leather glove, and remnants of a cartridge belt. None of the uniform or equipment pieces had markings.²²

All efforts by the AGRC to identify the X-8517 remains were unsuccessful. On 30 March 1951, an AGRC Board of Review declared that “sufficient evidence is not available to establish the identity of the deceased concerned, and it is recommended [that] these remains be classified as unidentifiable.”²³ The X-8517 remains were interred on 17 July 1951, in Plot I, Row 20, Grave 14, at U.S. Military Cemetery (USMC) Carthage, Tunisia (today North Africa American Cemetery).²⁴

To determine the list of individuals who could be associated with the X-8517 remains, the DPAA historian studied all unresolved American losses around the Wallendorf area. The first American troops to approach Wallendorf were part of the 5th Armored Division and 28th Infantry Division in September 1944, hotly pursuing German troops retreating through Luxembourg into their home country. Seeing an opportunity to break into Germany against little resistance, on 14 September the 5th Armored Division troops aggressively crossed the Sauer River at the Wallendorf bridge and advanced more than a dozen miles eastward before being stopped by aggressive German counterattacks and resupply issues. For several days, the Americans tried to hold their Wallendorf salient before finally being forced to withdraw back into Luxembourg on 21 September 1944 (see Figure 5). More than 20 American soldiers are still unaccounted-for from the September 1944 fighting. Analysts from the AGRC believed the X-8517 remains were likely one of those casualties. However, the DPAA historian concluded that none of the soldiers missing from September 1944 were lost in the X-8517 recovery area, 1.86 miles southeast of Wallendorf. Instead, most September 1944 American losses occurred along the northern edge of the salient—a line that runs three to six miles away from the X-8517 recovery site. The closest recorded American casualties during the September 1944 fighting were well outside the forest at Biesdorf, which lies 1¼ miles north of the recovery site.

Instead, the DPAA historian concluded that the X-8517 remains most likely belong to a member of the 318th Infantry Regiment, 80th Infantry Division, which fought in the recovery area in February 1945. As described earlier in this report, the 318th Infantry Regiment crossed the Sauer River in the heavily wooded terrain southeast of Wallendorf in early February 1945. Once

²² “QMC Form 1044,” Page 1, 1 March 1951, X-8517 file.

²³ “Certificate of Unidentification of Remains,” 30 March 1951, X-8517 file.

²⁴ “Disinterment Directive,” 23 April 1951, X-8517 file; “WWII_Burial_Location_File,” DPAA file. **NOTE:** The X-8517 remains were recovered and processed during the latter stages of the American Graves Registration Command’s (AGRC’s) repatriation program. As such, many of the permanent U.S. military cemeteries in Europe (those currently operated by the American Battle Monuments Commission [ABMC]) had limited burial space according to their respective designs. This prompted AGRC officials to occasionally send remains to U.S. cemeteries in other parts of Europe and the Mediterranean area, based upon available grave space. The X-8517 remains were sent to Tunisia for this reason.

across, the 2d Battalion troops advanced northward, passing through woods and high ground south of Biesdorf while the 3d Battalion advanced southward (Figure 6).²⁵



Figure 6. Between 7 and 9 February 1945, the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 318th Infantry Regiment crossed the Sauer River southeast of Wallendorf and moved north and south to eliminate enemy soldiers. The gold star marks the X-8517 recovery area.

The two battalions had cleared the woods by 10 February, and there was no more fighting in the forest southeast of Wallendorf. Today, five soldiers from the 318th Infantry Regiment are still unaccounted-for from the February 1945 fighting around Wallendorf. All five of them, including Pvt Woo, were last seen in the woods southeast of Wallendorf.

Following this comprehensive study, the DPAA historian recommended that the X-8517 remains be disinterred and scientifically analyzed for possible identification. DPAA scientists then compared the five historical candidates' physiological data to the X-8517 records and concurred

²⁵ "318th Infantry Regiment After Action Report," 8 February 1945, Folder: 380-INF(318)-0.3 A/A Rpts – 318th Inf Regt – 80th Inf Div. Jan-May 45, Box 10299, 80th Infantry Division, Entry 427, RG 407, NARA.

with the recommendation to exhume the remains for laboratory analysis.²⁶ Following this multidisciplinary analysis, DPAA officials recommended disinterring X-8517 Neuville for scientific testing and identification. The Department of Defense and American Battle Monuments Commission exhumed the remains in September 2022 and transferred them to the DPAA laboratory.

During careful scientific analysis, DPAA anthropologists determined that the X-8517 remains contained portions of three individuals. They segregated the remains according to physiological and DNA analysis.

Based upon the location of the recovery and comprehensive historical research of combat in the areas near Wallendorf and Biesdorf, Germany, the Europe-Mediterranean Directorate concludes that an association between Private Kwack K. Woo and the remains designated CIL 2022-223-I-03 is historically likely.

Approved:

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²⁶ “Association of Unknown X-8517 Neuville with One Unresolved World War II Casualty,” 5 April 2017, DPAA electronic case file.